

Natural yard care

Rain barrels are a perfect fit with all the other techniques of Natural Yard Care. Building healthy soil, planting right for your site, practicing smart watering (making every drop count and watering from rain barrels when you can), thinking twice before using pesticides or herbicides, and practicing natural lawn care are all part of gardening the natural, Seattle friendly way. For more information on Natural Yard Care techniques, look through the Natural Yard Care booklet you received at the rain barrel sale. It's all in there. And if you have more questions you can call the Natural Yard Care hotline at 206-633-0224.



When not to use a rain barrel - Continued

(you may want to remove them), or if you have had your roof treated with moss-, lichen- or algae-killing chemicals within the last several years.

Maintaining your rain barrel

Rain barrels take very little maintenance. From time to time, particularly in the fall, you'll need to clean leaves and other material off the top in order not to clog the screen. Also make sure the overflow is not clogged. In the winter when rains are heaviest, you may want to reconnect your downspouts, or use a downspout adapter (described above), to send the heaviest flows back into your drainage system.

By the way, while it can be done, we don't recommend painting your rain barrel. They are flexible and will expand and contract with the weather, so many paints are likely to chip off, leaving paint flakes in your soil.

A note on saving water

Unless you have four or five, using rain barrels won't make much difference in your water bill. You may not even notice it. But over time, if you garden the Natural Yard Care way, savings will add up. Composting, mulching, using soaker hoses instead of sprinklers and a watering can instead of a hose even when your rain barrels are empty will add to your water conservation.

And while you're thinking about water conservation, remember that if you haven't done so already, changing to modern 1.6-gallon-per-flush toilets and low-flow water-saving showerheads are the most money- and water-saving steps you can take.

More information and follow up study

When you purchased your barrel you filled out a card giving us information so we can contact you for a follow up study. You may get a phone call or email later in the summer or early fall. At that time, we'll ask you a few questions about how your rain barrel changed—or did not change—your garden watering habits. You may also be called later this spring if you indicated you were willing to keep a watering diary for our research.

Thank you for purchasing a Seattle Rain Barrel

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Public
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(206) 633-0224

visit www.seattle.gov/util/rainbarrel

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The Seattle Rain Barrel

A service of Seattle Public Utilities

Installing your Seattle Rain Barrel

It's pretty simple. Here are a few suggestions. **You'll probably want to pick the downspout or downspouts closest to the gardens where you'll most frequently want to water—near your vegetable plot or pots on your deck.**



Install your barrel on level ground

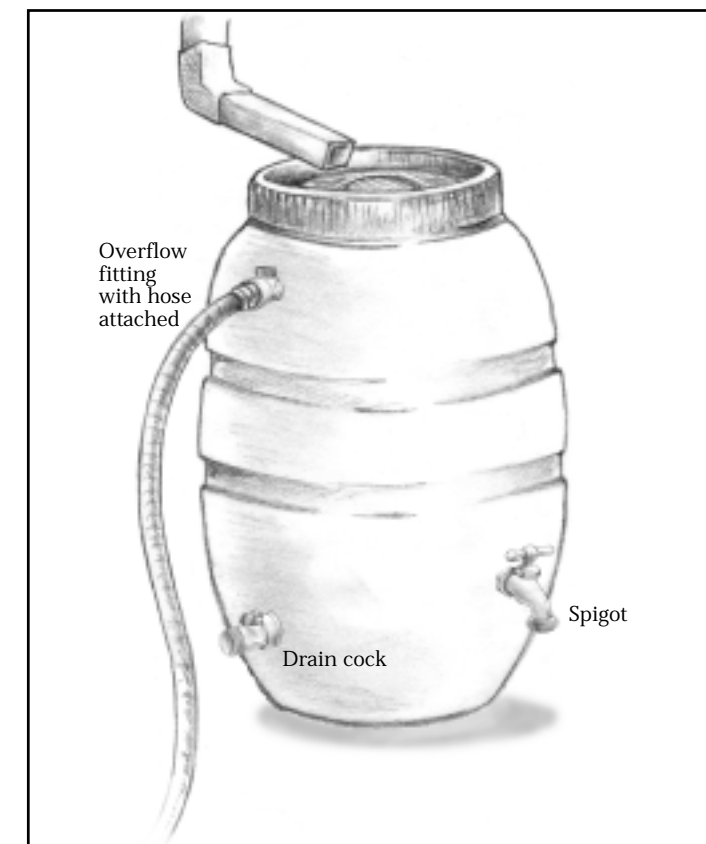
Position your barrel on level ground in front of your downspout. (Some people prefer to set their barrels on cinder blocks to provide easier access to the lower valve. Make sure the blocks are level if you do this.) Cut the downspout—a hacksaw works well for both metal and plastic downspouts—about eight inches above the top of the barrel. Remove the lower section of downspout and slide the barrel into its permanent place.

To the remaining upper section of downspout attach a downspout elbow and short section of downspout to direct water onto the screened lid of your rain barrel. You may already have an elbow if the bottom of your

downspout was directed onto a splash block. Otherwise, you'll need to get one at a hardware store.

(Whether plastic or metal, downspouts come in only a few standard sizes, commonly three-inch and four-inch rectangular, and two-inch round, but it's a good idea to take a section with you to the store.)

As an alternative, you may want to invest in a downspout adapter. These are rela-



tively simple hinged downspout sections usually costing less than \$20. They enable you to direct water flow onto the top of the barrel when you need it but switch back to the downspout carrying water to your drainage system during the winter when heavy rains cause regular overflows. (Downspout adapters have most often been available at Home Depot and McLendon’s Hardware stores. They’re not always in stock, though, so call the store before making a trip.)

Attach a section of hose to the overflow fitting

Next, attach a section of hose to the gray plastic, threaded overflow fitting at the top of the barrel. Using the hose, which can be an old piece you can cut to any length, direct the overflow where you want it to go. This can be back into your downspout, or—as long as you’re not in a landslide-prone area—away from the foundation of your house into a swale (a low spot in a lawn or planting area which fills with runoff during heavy rains, dries as the runoff soaks in), or French drain (usually a trench filled with gravel under a garden or lawn). French drains can be built to take water through a pipe directly from your downspout or overflow, or located under a swale to promote rapid absorption of water into the soil.

Above all, be sure to attach an overflow hose as soon as your barrel is set up, because this prevents mosquitoes from entering through the overflow fitting.

Using water from your rain barrel

Your rain barrel has a spigot attached 12 to 14 inches from the bottom. It’s designed to be a handy height for filling your watering can, making it easy to water vegetable rows, small plantings of annuals or potted plants on a deck. Using a watering can, it’s easy to water carefully, applying just the right amount. You can also attach a soaker hose to the drain cock at the bottom of your rain barrel, using that to water nearby plantings as needed.



What about mosquitoes?

Your rain barrel lid is screened to keep out mosquitoes. To keep them from entering through the overflow fitting, be sure you always have an overflow hose attached.



In fact, now that you have a rain barrel, it’s a good time to clean your gutters so puddles where mosquitoes can breed don’t form behind dams of moss or rotting leaves. You should also adjust the brackets holding your gutters to make sure all gutters slope toward downspouts and quickly drain dry after a rain. Sagging gutters also create puddles where mosquitoes can breed.

Connecting barrels together

You can connect two or more barrels together at any time with a short length of hose and a device called a hose Y. They’re available at most hardware stores. You’ll also need two female garden-hose end fittings—the fittings that screw onto the faucet. Attach these fittings to each end of a length of old hose. Attach the Y to the drain cock on one barrel and fasten the short piece of hose to it and to the drain cock on your second barrel. You can add more barrels later. Connecting barrels lets you draw water from all of them using the same spigot or drain cock, which is handy since you may want to locate additional barrels in hard-to-reach places such as camouflaged behind shrubbery. To prevent mosquitoes from entering, be sure to cap any overflow fittings to which you do not connect a hose.



When not to use a rain barrel

If you have certain kinds of roofing material you shouldn’t use rain barrels. If your roof is made of wood shingles or shakes that have been treated with any chemical (usually chromated copper arsenate—CCA) to make them resistant to rot and moss, lichen and algae growth, don’t use a rain barrel. Zinc (galvanized metal) anti-moss strips—usually mounted at the roof peak—also produce toxic chemicals you don’t want in your garden. Don’t use rain barrels if you have these strips

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Warning! Remember, the water in your rain barrel is NOT POTABLE. Do not use for drinking, washing or cooking.
¡Peligro! Agua no es potable. No se use para tomar, lavar, ni cocinar.

The water in your rain barrel likely will contain fecal coliform bacteria from bird droppings and other microbes.



About your new barrel

The barrel you’ve purchased has been recycled from the food industry. All the barrels Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) is offering at this time came from Greece via California. They were shipped from the Mediterranean full of olives or peppers in brine for bottling in the U.S. If your barrel is marked 190 Liters, it’s about 50 gallons; if 230 liters, it’s about 60 gallons.

After they were emptied at packing plants in California, SPU had these barrels shipped by truck directly to Sand Point Magnuson Park. The fittings— drain cock, spigot and overflow along with mosquito screening—were attached here by the Seattle Conservation Corps, a jobs-training program run by Seattle Parks and Recreation.

Thank you for using water wisely. Enjoy your new rain barrel.

